

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3181

INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMCONSUL TANGIER

C O N F I D E N T I A L CASABLANCA 1058

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, MO

SUBJECT: LABOR DISPUTE THREATENS SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS

1. SUMMARY: LABOR DISPUTE AT FRENCH-OWNED PLANT THAT PRINTS SEMI-OFFICIAL DAILIES LE MATIN AND MAROC SOIR INTERRUPTED PUBLICATION ON DECEMBER 3. OWNER CLAIMS PROBLEM REALLY DUE TO FACT PAPERS WON'T PAY THEIR PRINTING BILLS. UMT, ALTHOUGH WELL AWARE GOM SENSITIVITY ON MATTER OF ITS NEWSPAPERS, THREATENING GENERAL STRIKE IN PRINTING INDUSTRY NEXT WEEK IF DISPUTE NOT SETTLED. THERE SOME SPECULATION GOM MAY WISH FORCE OUT OWNER IN ORDER TAKE CONTROL OF PLANT.

2. BACKGROUND: TWO MAJOR MOROCCAN DAILIES WERE LONG IN HANDS OF MAS FAMILY, LONG-TIME FRENCH RESIDENTS OF CASABLANCA CONSIDERED BY MANY MOROCCANS TO BE ULTRA REACTIONARY. IN NOVEMBER 1972 GOM FORCED SALE OF PAPERS TO SEMI-OFFICIAL LE MATIN - MAROC SOIR, BUT ALLOWED MAS FAMILY RETAIN OWNERSHIP PRINTING PLANT, IMPERIMERIES REUNIES. PLANT WAS IMMEDIATELY "REQUISITIONED" BY GOM WHICH MEANT THAT IT IS REQUIRED PRINT WHATEVER GOM REQUIRED IT TO PRINT SO BUILD NOT SHUT DOWN ETC. SINCE 1972 MAS HAS HAD CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY IN COLLECTING FROM NEWSPAPERS, AND CLAIMS THAT HE HAS NOT BEEN PAID ANY PRINTING FEES WHATSOEVER FOR THE LAST
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SEVEN MONTHS.

3. AS RESULT THIS LOSS INCOME, MAS HAS CUT EXPENSES WHEREVER HE COULD, INCLUDING OVER-TIME PAY, RAISES AND ROUTINE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ABROAD. EFFECT UPON EMPLOYEE MORALE OBVIOUS, AND UNION MAROCAINE DU TRAVAIL HAS BEEN MAKING DEMANDS FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. THIS WEEK THE UMT LAUNCHED A STRIKE OF TWO HOURS PER SHIFT, AND MANAGED TO PREVENT PUBLICATION OF THE TWO PAPERS ON DECEMBER 3.

4. DISPUTE REMAINS UNRESOLVED, AND UMT SOURCES CLAIM UNION WILL LAUNCH GENERAL STRIKE IN PRINTING INDUSTRY NEXT WEEK IF AGREEMENT WITH MAS NOT REACHED. THIS THREAT IF MADE GOOD, WOULD PRESUMABLY SHUT DOWN PAPERS AND WOULD QUICKLY PROVOKE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GOM AND UMT. HOWEVER UNION IS WELL AWARE OF POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS WITHIN WHICH IT MUST OPERATE,-AND WE DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD RISK SERIOUS AND ONE-SIDED CLASH WITH GOM.

5. INTERESTING SIDESHOW PROVIDED BY EDITORIAL ATTACKS FEATURING MOULAY AHMED ALAWI, DIRECTOR OF LE MATIN - MAROC SOIR VERSUS UMT AND ISTIQLAL FRENCH-LANGUAGE DAILIES. LATTER TWO PAPERS RAN MAS AD WHICH SAID IN EFFECT PROBLETS DUE TO NON-PAYMENT OF PRINTING BILLS. ALAWI ACCUSED UMT AND ISTIQLAL OF SUPPORTING A COLONIALIST. BATTLE STILL RAGES WITH CENSOR SITTING IT OUT SO FAR.

6. WE HAVE HEARD SOME SPECULATION THAT NON-PAYMENT OF PRINTING BILLS MIGHT BE DUE TO EFFORT BY ALAWI AND GOM TO FORCE MAS OUT. THIS SOUNDS FEASIBLE. ALSO CONCEIVABLE WOULD BE GOM-UMT COLLUSION IN ALLOWING LABOR SITUATION AT PLANT TO DETERIORATE TOWARDS SAME END.
BRUBECK

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